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# Political communication of Germany as a state of mature democracy in the context of the migrant crisis of the 2010s

## Introduction

The aim of the article is to conduct an analysis within media research and political science of the political discourse of Angela Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany, regarding refugees, which began with the famous slogan *Wir schaffen das!* proclaimed by the German politician on 31 August 2015, during the annual press conference in Berlin with accredited journalists, as Germany was facing the growing European migrant crisis, which triggered much commentary and opinions in relation to the publicly unveiled Willkommenskultur.<sup>1</sup> I shall quote statements by leading European politicians which referred to the position of the Chancellor of Germany, and, using the example of Wirtualna Polska, the most popular opinion-making website in Poland<sup>2</sup>, I shall verify whether the media agenda included matters related to the migrant policy of the Chancellor of Germany. The study

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1 R. Mehring, "Goethes Flüchtlinge: Poetisierung des Dramas", *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 2016, issue 68(4), pp. 313–333; W. Bergem, "Die Flüchtlingskrise als Identitätskrise. Multiple Identitäten als Voraussetzung und Merkmal erfolgreicher Integration von Migrantinnen und Migranten", *Diagonal* 2016, issue 37(1), pp. 351–360.

2 According to a study by the Institute of Media Monitoring published on 9.02.2017, the most frequently quoted website in 2016 was wp.pl (cf. IMM: *Najbardziej opiniotwórcze media w 2016 roku*, <http://www.proto.pl/aktualnosci/imm-najbardziej-opiniotworcze-media-w-2016-roku> [accessed on: 9.04.2019]).

applies to the period from 31 August 2015 to 28 February 2017. I considered the period of eighteen months from Angela Merkel's announcement of her decision as a period sufficiently long for examining how the Polish website, which is one of the major indicators of public opinion in Poland, perceived her decision.

## Germany as a state of mature democracy *Wir schaffen das!* A new direction in migrant policy

Political scientists have made various attempts at scientifically indicating and explaining the significance of the major features of a mature democracy, also referred to as a consolidated democracy.<sup>3</sup> The processes of democracy consolidation are complex, and multi-faceted, and their definition has triggered the formation of various academic stances.<sup>4</sup> Among the multitude of theoretical approaches, one can, however, indicate the major mechanisms of a mature democracy featured in academic publications. Those mainly refer to three areas: politics and the law, society, and culture.<sup>5</sup> The first area includes: periodic competitive elections, the ability to utilise one's freedom of association, the ability to freely express one's opinion, the existence of alternative sources of information, government alternations, overcoming crisis situations without breaking the stable democratic order, the functioning of the principle of the separation of powers, equality of all citizens under the law, and the respecting of minority rights. In terms of the social area, the main features include: a civic society functioning efficiently,

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<sup>3</sup> In the article, I used two notions interchangeably: mature democracy and consolidated democracy (cf. H. Hegre, "Toward a democratic civil peace? Democracy, political change, and civil war, 1816–1992", *American Political Science Association* 2001, vol. 95, issue 1, pp. 33–48).

<sup>4</sup> M. Burton, R. Gunther, J. Higley, "Introduction: Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe: an overview", [in:] *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe*, eds. J. Higley, R. Gunther, Cambridge University Press 1992, pp. 1–37; R. Markowski, *Populizm a demokracja*, Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warsaw 2004, pp. 80–81; S. Huntington, *Trzecia fala demokracji*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warsaw 1995; A. Antoszewski, "Społeczeństwo obywatelskie a proces konsolidacji demokracji", [in:] *Studia z teorii polityki*, eds. A. Czajowski, L. Sobkowiak, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2000, vol. 3, pp. 7–21; R. Solarz, *Kulturowe uwarunkowania procesu przekształceń polskiego systemu politycznego w latach 90.*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2001, pp. 114–115; P. Sekuła, *Kultura polityczna a konsolidacja demokracji*, Krakowskie Towarzystwo Edukacyjne – Oficyna Wydawnicza AFM, Krakow 2009, pp. 61–73; A. Siedschlag, *Politische Institutionalisierung und Konflikttransformation: Leitideen, Theoriemodelle und europäische Praxisfälle*, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Berlin 2000, pp. 127–133.

<sup>5</sup> B. Szyja, "Zjawiska niepokojące na obszarze konsolidacji polskiej demokracji u schyłku pierwszej dekady XXI wieku – wybrane aspekty", *Kwartalnik Naukowy OAP UW e-Politikon* 2013, issue 5, p. 199.

visible participation of citizens in community life, the existence of social capital, and the acceptance of mechanisms which enable deliberation. The features of the cultural area include support for democracy as a general idea and for the rules of democracy, and a high level of citizen engagement in politics manifested in, e.g. voting in elections. If such features exist in a political system, it can be referred to as a system of mature democracy.<sup>6</sup> The political system of Germany in the 2010s was undeniably a mature democracy, even if one were to consider the differences between the former DDR and West Germany regarding citizens' engagement in elections throughout the last 25 years, i.e. since the union of the old and the new federal states. Germany is a consolidated democracy state, as indicated by numerous academic publications.<sup>7</sup> The American organisation Freedom House, which every year prepares a report on the condition of democracy and freedom in all the countries of the world, considers Germany as one of the countries where two main indicators of the condition of democracy, i.e. political rights and civil liberties, classify it as a "free" country.<sup>8</sup>

2015 will be remembered in Germany's foreign policy for Angela Merkel's decision regarding the opening of borders to refugees. Why did the German Chancellor decide to implement the famous "Wir schaffen das!?" She quite clearly explained it in an interview entitled "With deep conviction" (*Aus tiefer Überzeugung*), conducted by Stefan Braun and Evelyn Roll published in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on 30 August 2016.<sup>9</sup> At the beginning of the interview, the Chancellor confirmed that one day prior to the above-mentioned press conference of 31 August 2015, she was aware of the forecast 800,000 refugees who could arrive in Germany. That, in turn,

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6 Ibidem, pp. 199–200.

7 K. Koźbiał, "Kryzys demokracji na Wschodzie? Frekwencja wyborcza w nowych krajach związkowych RFN 25 lat po zjednoczeniu", *Athenaeum. Polskie Studia Politologiczne* 2016, vol. 49, pp. 138–153; M. Żyromski, "Demokracja bezpośrednia i partycypacja polityczna – mit czy rzeczywistość?", *Przegląd Politologiczny* 2014, issue 4, pp. 77–85; A. Moroska, "Delegalizacja partii politycznych jako instrument bezpieczeństwa wewnętrznego państwa. Analiza na przykładzie Niemiec", *Rocznik Bezpieczeństwa Międzynarodowego* 2010, issue 5, pp. 155–176; A. Mihr, "Demokratie, Menschenrechtskultur und Menschenrechtsbildung in Deutschland", [in:] *Menschenrechtsbildung. Bilanz und Perspektiven*, eds. C. Mahler, A. Mihr, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden 2004, pp. 219–231; Ch. Krell, T. Meyer, T. Mörschel, "Demokratie in Deutschland. Wandel, aktuelle Herausforderungen, normative Grundlagen und Perspektiven", [in:] *Demokratie in Deutschland. Zustand – Herausforderungen – Perspektiven*, eds. T. Mörschel, C. Krell, Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden 2012, pp. 9–30.

8 *Freedom in the World report 2016*, [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH\\_FITW\\_Report\\_2016.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH_FITW_Report_2016.pdf) [accessed on: 9.04.2019].

9 A. Merkel, *Aus tiefer Überzeugung*, interview by S. Braun, E. Roll, 30.08.2016, <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/bundeskanzlerin-angela-merkel-im-interview-aus-tiefer-ueberzeugung-1.3141421> [accessed on: 9.04.2019].

meant for Germany a social, cultural and political challenge. Her press conference was held a few days after she had visited a refugee centre in Heidenau near Dresden (26 August 2015), an event which was accompanied by demonstrations against the influx of asylum seekers, organised by the extreme right-wing NPD (National Democratic Party of Germany – *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands*).<sup>10</sup> In the interview, the Chancellor noted that the word “wir” (we) referred to both Germany as a strong state, and to all EU Member States.<sup>11</sup> Merkel enumerated various bodies which participated in the efforts to integrate refugees (e.g. the fire department, Amnesty International, trade unions, churches), as well as efforts within intra-state communication. The Chancellor read the activities undertaken by Germany regarding refugees as an implementation of constitutional provisions, the readiness to provide humanitarian aid, which is the core of European and foreign policy. Merkel was aware of the integration difficulties resulting from cultural, religious and language differences, yet, according to her, those were obstacles which could be overcome.<sup>12</sup> In her view, the contemporary challenges faced by Germany and the European Union also include increased international cooperation with Turkey and African states, commitment to principles and basic values in the context of modern globalisation processes, and introducing order to matters related to ensuring security at the EU’s external borders. The interview for the Munich-based daily did not omit the views of the populist right-wing German

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<sup>10</sup> H. Funke, “Kriege, Flüchtlinge, Menschenrechte, Terror und die Gefahren von rechts als besondere politische Herausforderungen”, [in:] *Flüchtlinge*, eds. C. Ghaderi, T. Eppenstein, Springer Fachmedien, Wiesbaden 2017, pp. 31–49; V. Dubsloff, “Crise des réfugiés et crispations identitaires: l’Allemagne en proie au national-populisme”, *Allemagne d’aujourd’hui* 2016, issue 2, pp. 20–28.

<sup>11</sup> “Ich meinte mich als Bundeskanzlerin, dazu alle Politiker, die den Anspruch haben, diese Aufgabe zu bewältigen, und natürlich meinte ich auch die vielen Ehrenamtlichen, die Hilfsorganisationen, die Wirtschaft und die übrige Gesellschaft, letztlich uns alle, denn Deutschland war und ist ein starkes Land. Das Wir geht aber über Deutschland hinaus: Wir Europäer müssen es schaffen, die EU-Außengrenzen zu sichern und gleichzeitig die Freizügigkeit im Inneren des Schengenraums zu erhalten. Und wenn Sie es noch weiter denken wollen, sind auch all die in das Wir einbezogen, aus deren Regionen die Flüchtlinge kommen. Also all jene, die mit dazu beitragen können und müssen, wenn es um die Bewältigung von Flüchtlingskrisen geht.” (A. Merkel, *op. cit.*).

<sup>12</sup> “Die Situation wird ja oft mit der Aufnahme der Heimatvertriebenen nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg verglichen. Aber es ist etwas ganz anderes, ob jemand aus dem Irak, Syrien oder Eritrea kommt – und nicht die gleiche Sprache spricht und mit dem Islam einen anderen Glauben hat als die große Mehrheit der Menschen hier. Die Integrationsaufgaben sind anders und größer, aber sie sind zu schaffen, wenn wir uns an unseren Werten orientieren.” (A. Merkel, *op. cit.*).

parties, or their anti-immigration attitudes, or the dangers related to hypothetical terrorist attacks, acts of violence and murders committed by Islamists.<sup>13</sup>

In their publications, both the German press and opinion websites discussed Merkel's 2015 decision expressing their support or disapproval for the "Wir schaffen das!" policy and indicated the complex nature of the context of the Chancellor's decision. As examples, I shall quote several selected publications from German opinion websites. The *Spiegel online* daily focussed on the unusual display of empathy in the German Chancellor. Vera Kämper noted that the decision of the head of the German federal government constituted a display of humanism worthy of imitation<sup>14</sup>. The journalist emphasised the change in the perception of the German Chancellor in international public opinion, as opposed to the previously unfavourable perception which was caused by Germany's political discourse of dictating EU Member States with high budget deficits to change their economic policies. The Chancellor's decision to accept hundreds of thousands of refugees was also viewed in the German press in terms of its social and cultural consequences, while the "Wir schaffen das!" slogan was viewed as Merkel's political failure, as she did not consider, e.g. Islamist extremism, Arabic anti-Semitism, nationalists or ethnic conflicts between other nationalities.<sup>15</sup> The analysed political decision was viewed by the German press as controversial, raising questions about the number of migrants whom Germany was able to accept without harm to its internal security.<sup>16</sup> The 2016 election for the Berlin regional parliament, which brought

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13 "Aber es ist einfach falsch, dass erst mit den Flüchtlingen der Terrorismus gekommen ist, denn der war schon vorher da in verschiedensten Formen und vor allem mit den vielen Gefährdern, die wir zu überwachen haben. Und es bleibt richtig, dass die ganz große Mehrheit der Flüchtlinge sich vor Gewalt, Mord, Bomben und Terror zu uns in Sicherheit gebracht hat und sich nichts als Ruhe und eine neue Chance zu leben wünscht." (A. Merkel, *op. cit.*).

14 V. Kämper, *Ausländische Presse zur Flüchtlingskrise. Vorbild Deutschland*, 1.09.2015, <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/fluechtlingskrise-auslaendische-medien-loben-deutschland-als-vorbild-a-1050931.html> [accessed on: 9.04.2019] ("Würden in der Euro-Krise noch Nazi-Vergleiche gezogen, loben ausländische Kommentatoren nun den Umgang mit Flüchtlingen. Die Merkel-Regierung zeige vorbildhafte Menschlichkeit. [...] Deutschland ist zur ersten Anlaufstelle für Flüchtlinge in Europa geworden. Während sich andere Länder um ihre Verantwortung drücken, werden hier überdurchschnittlich viele Asylbewerber aufgenommen. Und die Kanzlerin selbst hat deutliche Worte gefunden").

15 S. Aust, M. Bewarder, W. Büscher, M. Lutz, C. Malzahn, *Herbst der Kanzlerin. Geschichte eines Staatsversagens*, 9.11.2015, <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article148588383/Herbst-der-Kanzlerin-Geschichte-eines-Staatsversagens.html> [accessed on: 9.04.2019].

16 G. Blume, M. Brost, T. Hildebrandt, A. Hock, S. Klormann, A. Köckritz, M. Krupa, M. Lau, G. von Randow, M. Theile, M. Thumann, H. Wefing, *Grenzöffnung für Flüchtlinge. Was geschah wirklich?*, 22.08.2016, <http://www.zeit.de/2016/35/grenzoeffnung-fluechtlinge-september-2015-wochenende-angela-merkel-ungarn-oesterreich> [accessed on: 9.04.2019] ("Es ist eine

about a defeat of the Union parties in the state's capital, offered the Chancellor an opportunity to admit to certain errors in the migration policy while excluding the possibility of any change to it.<sup>17</sup>

It is also worth asking about the positions of the leaders of EU Member States in response to Angela Merkel's decision regarding Germany's acceptance of refugees. On 15 February 2016, i.e. one day prior to an EU summit meeting, Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, commended Germany's Chancellor on the policy of her government towards refugees. He compared the German politician to Helmut Kohl, a former German chancellor, who pushed for the idea of a united Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall, which should be considered as praise for the brave decisions made by the head of the German government.<sup>18</sup> Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, expressed disapproval of the German policy towards refugees. According to him, the policy of opened doors and windows should have been corrected, and control at the EU's external borders should have been increased.<sup>19</sup> Joachim Gauck, President of Germany (2012–2017), supported Angela Merkel's efforts noting that Germany "is not a sinking ship during a severe storm", and the situation of the inflow of migrants rather resembled gusts which could cause disorder in society. At the same time, he supported the efforts of Thomas de Maizière, Minister of Internal Affairs, regarding security policy.<sup>20</sup> On 7 October 2015, during a meeting of the

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umstrittene Entscheidung, die das Land spalten wird und noch immer spaltet, der Riss geht durch Familien, Vereine, Betriebe, Redaktionen: Wie viel Zuwanderung halten wir aus? Woher kommen die Menschen, die wir aufnehmen? Sind potenzielle Attentäter darunter? Wie steht es um unsere Sicherheit? Vor allem aber: Hat Angela Merkel die Menschen dazu ermuntert, zu uns zu kommen – oder wären sie ohnehin gekommen?").

<sup>17</sup> Ch. Geyer, *Angela Merkels „Wir schaffen das“ in der Flüchtlingspolitik*, 20.09.2016, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/angela-merkels-wir-schaffen-das-in-der-fluechtlingspolitik-14443464.html> [accessed on: 9.04.2019]; apa, pap, *Niemcy. Merkel składa samokrytykę, broni swej polityki migracyjnej*, 19.09.2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,20716132,niemcy-merkel-sklada-samokrytyke-broni-swej-polityki-migracyjnej.html> [accessed on: 9.04.2019].

<sup>18</sup> arb, *Szef KE Jean-Claude Juncker chwali Angelę Merkel za politykę imigracyjną*, 17.02.2016, <http://www.rp.pl/Uchodzcy/160219377-Szef-KE-Jean-Claude-Juncker-chwali-Angele-Merkel-za-polityke-imigracyjna.html#ap-1> [accessed on: 9.04.2019]; aar/Reuters/AFP/dpa, *Jean-Claude Juncker: „Die Geschichte wird Angela Merkel recht geben“*, 17.02.2016, <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/fluechtlinge-jean-claude-juncker-staerkt-angela-merkel-a-1077757.html> [accessed on: 9.04.2019].

<sup>19</sup> A. Riedel, *Kritik an deutscher Flüchtlingspolitik*, 4.12.2015, [http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/eu-ratspraesident-donald-tusk-kritik-an-deutscher.1773.de.html?dram:article\\_id=338782](http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/eu-ratspraesident-donald-tusk-kritik-an-deutscher.1773.de.html?dram:article_id=338782) [accessed on: 9.04.2019].

<sup>20</sup> "Das Land ist nicht in einem Zustand wie ein sinkendes Schiff, es ist noch nicht mal in einem Zustand eines schweren Orkans, sondern es sind Böen, die uns schütteln, und

leaders of EU Member States, François Hollande, President of France (2012–2017), indicated the reason in the German Chancellor's efforts in terms of migration policy, and warned against the return of nationalist tendencies in Europe<sup>21</sup>. On 31 August 2016, during a meeting in Maranello, Matteo Renzi, Prime Minister of Italy (2014–2016), expressed his support for the efforts of the head of the German government stressing the need for an even and just distribution of refugees. He also indicated specific figure-based limits regarding EU Member States' capabilities to accept migrants.<sup>22</sup>

The above-quoted selected statements by European politicians and press reactions referring to the political decision of the German Chancellor indicated two major criteria for the evaluation of Angela Merkel's political communication. Those are: the welcoming culture (*Willkommenskultur*), and the sense of reality (*Wahrheitskultur*).

### **Wir schaffen das! Media research analysis of the publications at wp.pl**

I conducted a hermeneutic interpretation of texts which referred to Angela Merkel's political discourse regarding the acceptance of refugees posted on the Wirtualna Polska website.<sup>23</sup> In general, I identified seven publications posted on the wp.pl website which referred to Angela Merkel's migration policy directly, and

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es sind Böen, die die Gesellschaft auch durcheinanderbringen ein wenig." (dpa, *Gauck unterstützt Merkel: Deutschland ist kein sinkendes Schiff*, 13.08.2016, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/fluechtlingskrise/gauck-unterstuetzt-merkel-deutschland-ist-kein-sinkendes-schiff-14386757.html> [accessed on: 9.04.2019]).

- 21 "Zuvor hatte François Hollande in einer ernsten Ansprache gemeinsam mit Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel vor einer Rückkehr des Nationalismus in Europa gewarnt. Die Souveränität eines Staates sei kein Wert an sich. In Europa müsse die Souveränität der Einzelnen gebündelt werden." (B. Riegert, *Merkel und Hollande: Gemeinsam für Flüchtlinge*, 7.01.2015, <http://www.dw.com/de/merkel-und-hollande-gemeinsam-für-flüchtlinge/a-18766895> [accessed on: 9.04.2019]).
- 22 "Italiens Regierungschef Matteo Renzi sagte, beide Länder wollten, dass Flüchtlinge gleichmäßig und gerecht in Europa verteilt würden. Wir wissen, dass es Grenzen gibt. Es ist undenkbar, dass Europa jeden aufnehmen kann." (*Übereinstimmung in Flüchtlingsfrage. Merkel und Renzi: Nicht jeder kann bleiben*, 31.08.2016, <http://www.n-tv.de/politik/Merkel-und-Renzi-Nicht-jeder-kann-bleiben-article18541126.html> [accessed on: 9.04.2019]).
- 23 The analysis covered press texts published at wp.pl which included one of the following terms: "Merkel", "kanclerz Niemiec" [German Chancellor] or "polityka migracyjna" [migration policy], "Wir schaffen das!" [We'll handle this], "uchodźcy" [refugees]. Those texts had to actually raise the topic of the migration policy by the German Chancellor, not simply meet the formal criteria. The study material consisted of publications published within the period from 31 August 2015 to 28 February 2017.

several other publications available on the website which discussed the topic of migrants within a broader scope. Upon their analysis, it should be noted that in terms of information selection, the texts did not omit either Chancellor Merkel's fact-based arguments in favour of accepting refugees in 2015 or the arguments of her opponents. *Wirtualna Polska's* editors responsible for presenting those processes of political communication discussed in detail the major points of Chancellor Merkel's 2016 interview in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* daily, in which she admitted to having ignored the problem of refugees for too long and the mistakes made in that area, yet she also maintained her position on the validity of the 2015 decision regarding refugees.<sup>24</sup> A similar tone, though presenting a slight correction in Merkel's migration policy, was employed in a text published at *wp.pl*, which reported on the German Chancellor's intention to increase the severity of the deportation law and on the difficulties in its application.<sup>25</sup> The website also indicated statements by the head of the German government demanding a fairer distribution of refugees, which expressed her disapproval of the attitudes of those states which rejected the possibility of accepting Muslims, and the urgent need to negotiate with African states.<sup>26</sup> *Wirtualna Polska* also reported on the arguments of the opponents of Chancellor Merkel's migration policy. It reported on her visit to Prague on 25 August 2016, during which Bohuslav Sobotka, Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, and Miloš Zeman, President of the Czech Republic, expressed an opposing view on refugee quotas and that the asylum system based on quotas was unacceptable for the Czech Republic.<sup>27</sup> The website also focussed on the critical remarks of Sigmar Gabriel, head of SPD and Deputy Chancellor in the coalition government, towards Merkel, which he expressed in an interview for channel 2 of ZDF German public television. He stated there that "it is not enough to repeat over and over: we'll handle this" and that "it is unthinkable to accept in Germany a million people every year."<sup>28</sup> *Wp.pl* also reported on the critical

24 *Angela Merkel dla „Sueddeutsche Zeitung”: hasło „damy radę” było słuszne*, 31.08.2016, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/angela-merkel-dla-sueddeutsche-zeitung-haslo-damy-rade-bylo-sluszne-6031887478014593a> [accessed on: 9.04.2019].

25 *Angela Merkel broni swoich decyzji. Ale chce zaostrzyć prawo deportacyjne*, 18.01.2017, <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/angela-merkel-broni-swoich-decyzji-ale-chce-zaostrzyc-prawo-deportacyjne-6081416625960065a> [accessed on: 9.04.2019].

26 *Angela Merkel broni swojej polityki migracyjnej oraz systemu relokacji uchodźców w UE*, 28.08.2016, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/angela-merkel-broni-swojej-polityki-migracyjnej-oraz-systemu-relokacji-uchodzcow-w-ue-6030978667836033a> [accessed on: 9.04.2019].

27 *Odmienne stanowiska Niemiec i Czech w sprawie uchodźców*, 26.08.2016, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/odmienne-stanowiska-niemiec-i-czech-w-sprawie-uchodzcow-6030049562079873a> [accessed on: 9.04.2019].

28 *Zgrzyty w rządzie Niemiec. Wicekanclerz Gabriel krytykuje politykę migracyjną Merkel*, 28.08.2016, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/zgrzyty-w-rzadzcie-niemiec-wicekanclerz-gabriel-krytykuje->



remarks by the *Die Welt* daily towards the Chancellor. According to Michael Stuermer, an historian quoted by the newspaper, “the criticism of Germany by Central European states is harsh, yet, unfortunately, justified. Not everyone wants to be governed the German way.”<sup>29</sup> According to him, one should understand the most recent history of Eastern European states, the problem of their statehoods and the rights of their citizens, and the valuable state sovereignty regained 25 years earlier: “those states do not wish to let their sovereignty be taken away by the EU, and most certainly not by German diktat.”<sup>30</sup> *Die Welt*’s interviewee argued that the German Chancellor should have found the appropriate proportion between balance and leadership: “When the German government gives up leadership, the situation becomes difficult; when it assumes leadership, the situation gets even worse,” he stated. In his opinion, a solution to that conflict was a “permanent German dilemma” which required skill and telephone diplomacy, as at the time when Helmut Kohl was Chancellor.”<sup>31</sup>

The migration policy of the German Chancellor could be viewed as a system of mutually dependant elements. Those included, e.g.: the media reactions to the decision by the head of the German government, related commentaries and opinions expressed by German politicians and leaders of other states, and the level of public support. The analysed texts considered the major social and political conditions within which the system operated. Angela Merkel’s decision communicated in the form of the “Wir schaffen das!” slogan was, in time, re-interpreted by herself, which was also reflected in the analysed texts. The wp.pl website reported on the support of the EU’s political leaders, and the demand for changes emphasised by the Chancellor and directed towards EU Member States regarding their migration policies. Then, the final message by Angela Merkel (in my opinion that was the interview in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of 30 August 2016) offered a change of the style of the language of her goals and political activities. The media research analysis indicated the existence of a feedback loop between the “Wir schaffen das!” slogan and the above-mentioned interview published in the German daily, which was influenced by factors which supported and opposed the direction of the German Chancellor’s migration policy.

In the conducted media research analysis of the publications published on the Wirtualna Polska website, I also referred to the theory of the value of information

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polityke-migracyjna-merkel-6030982387770497a [accessed on: 9.04.2019] [unless indicated otherwise, English versions of quotations were translated from Polish].

29 *Merkel w ogniu krytyki. “Nie wszyscy chcą być rządzeni według niemieckich wzorów”*, 28.08.2016, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/merkel-w-ogniu-krytyki-nie-wszyscy-chca-byc-rzadzeni-wedlug-niemieckich-wzorow-6030876726117505a> [accessed on: 9.04.2019].

30 Ibidem.

31 Ibidem.

in order to better understand the process of political communication of the “Wir schaffen das!” slogan. Within the content of the political discourse of the head of the German government of 31 August 2015 and of the interview by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, as well as of the publications posted at wp.pl, I identified the presence of the following information factors: the factor of relevance, the factor of personalisation, the factor of controversy, the factor of scope, and the factor of failure.<sup>32</sup>

The relevance category was determined by the events/issues with objectively high significance: the armed conflict in the Middle East, the health and life hazards for the thousands of people living in the combat zones in Syria, the various forms of humanitarian aid for refugees, and Angela Merkel’s proclamation of the *Willkommenskultur* policy. The personalisation category was realised in the viewing of the German Chancellor’s position on migration policy through the statements by the leaders of EU Member States, opinions by renowned political scientists, and the statement by the Chancellor herself quoted by the wp.pl website. The “Wir schaffen das!” slogan and Angela Merkel’s views were not unequivocal for the authors of Wirtualna Polska. The following issues, directly or indirectly related to Merkel’s migration policy, proved controversial: whether the people flowing in should be treated as migrants or refugees. And, in turn: what the true motivations behind the decisions of people from the Middle East arriving in Germany were.<sup>33</sup> Also, any relationship between terrorist attacks in Europe and the issues of the EU’s internal security, and Merkel’s decision remained unclear for the wp.pl website. Other controversial issues included the media reactions related to the activities of extreme German organisations towards asylum seekers and the question about the number of refugees Germany was able to accept.<sup>34</sup> The scope category should be applied to the extent of the problem, which is not a local, regional or even national matter, but rather a problem of an international nature. The wp.pl website published texts regarding the routes travelled by the refugees, which indicated the extent of the issue, which was also present on the analysed website.<sup>35</sup> The failure category

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32 S. Michalczyk, *Jednostka i społeczeństwo w świecie mediów. Klasyczne i współczesne idee w teoriach średniego zasięgu*, Stowarzyszenie Thesaurus Silesiae – Skarb Śląski, “Śląsk” Sp. z o.o. Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Katowice 2015, p. 61.

33 M. Fabisiak, *Dlaczego Niemcy zaprosili uchodźców do Europy? “Pomagają ofiarom wojny” i nie tylko*, 10.09.2015, <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/dlaczego-niemcy-zaprosili-uchodzcow-do-europy-pomagaja-ofiarom-wojny-i-nie-tylko-6027693645431425a> [accessed on: 9.04.2019].

34 *Rząd centralny Niemiec i władze landów będą odsyłać imigrantów*, 10.02.2017, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/rzad-centralny-niemiec-i-wladze-landow-beda-odsylyc-imigrantow-6089463211447425a> [accessed on: 9.04.2019].

35 “Welt am Sonntag”: *więcej imigrantów wjeżdża do Niemiec z Polski*, 12.06.2016, <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/welt-am-sonntag-wiecej-imigrantow-wjezdza-do-niemiec-z-polski-6027382910497921a> [accessed on: 9.04.2019]; A. Parfieniuk, *Tak Afgańczycy próbują dostać się na Zachód. Stare szlaki są dla nich zamknięte, dlatego wybierają Moskwę, Indie, a nawet*

applied to Angela Merkel's statements presented in the interview by the Munich-based *Süddeutsche Zeitung* daily, in which she indicated, e.g. a lack of cooperation between EU Member States in terms of increasing security at the EU's external borders, and a lack of consent regarding the distribution of migrants within specific Member States.<sup>36</sup> Based on the theory of the value of information one could conclude that the existence of information factors in the political discourse related to the "Wir schaffen das!" slogan justified the interest of the Wirtualna Polska website in the processes of political communication analysed in this article.

## Conclusions

The media research analysis of the content of publications regarding Angela Merkel's decision of 31 August 2015 expressing an opened migration policy illustrates the major role of the media in interpreting the processes of political communication. Information selection processes are complex, and they occur not only at the level of the media, but also of sources and the audience. Therefore, those phenomena should be considered within the broad perspective of the engagement of various entities and diverse contexts conditioning the selection processes within the course: sources – the media – audience. The Polish wp.pl website presented a wide range of views on Angela Merkel's political decision and the political and social consequences of *Willkommenskultur*.

The analysis showed that some press releases included various points of view which referred to one issue, e.g. in the case of Merkel's migration policy, they featured statements by leading politicians who supported the political communication of the German Chancellor and her "Wir schaffen das!" slogan and those who opposed them.<sup>37</sup> The media polemic on that matter should also be viewed as a factor legitimising democracy. In the analysed case, there existed a conflict between the governing Merkel and a considerable portion of society expressing their disapproval of the Chancellor's decision.

Consolidated democracy as the context of the political events in Germany enabled me, within the scope of this study, to eliminate various forms of censorship, which should actually be interpreted as a category of information selection. In summary, the analysis of the mediated forms of Angela Merkel's communication published by the Wirtualna Polska website proved a useful tool for ensuring a better understanding of the processes of political communication.

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Kube, 20.04.2016, <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/tak-afganczycy-probuja-dostac-sie-na-zachod-stare-szlaki-sa-dla-nich-zamkniete-dlatego-wyberaja-moskwe-indie-a-nawet-kube-6025269823034497a> [accessed on: 9.04.2019].

<sup>36</sup> Angela Merkel dla „Sueddeutsche Zeitung”...

<sup>37</sup> Merkel w ogniu krytyki...

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Rafał Leśniczak

## **Komunikacja polityczna Niemiec jako stanu dojrzałej demokracji w kontekście kryzysu migracyjnego drugiej dekady XXI wieku**

### *Streszczenie*

Celem artykułu jest analiza medioznawcza i politologiczna dyskursu politycznego kanclerz Niemiec, Angeli Merkel, dotyczącego uchodźców, zapoczątkowanego słynnym sloganem *Wir schaffen das!* Czas badań obejmuje okres od 31.08.2015 do 28.02.2017. Autor wykorzystuje metodę analizy systemowej oraz metodę analizy zawartości. Materiał badawczy stanowią teksty opublikowane na portalu „Wirtualna Polska”.

**Słowa kluczowe:** komunikowanie polityczne, teoria wartości informacji, Angela Merkel, kryzys migracyjny.

## **Political communication of Germany as a state of mature democracy in the context of the migrant crisis of the 2010s**

### *Summary*

The aim of the article is the media and political analysis of the political discourse of German Chancellor Angela Merkel regarding refugees, launched by the famous slogan *Wir schaffen das!* The time study covers the period from 31.08.2015 to 28.02.2017. The author uses the system analysis method and the content analysis method. The research material is the texts published on the “Wirtualna Polska” portal.

**Keywords:** political communication, theory of news values, Angela Merkel, migration crisis



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